

# General Manager Patty Richards Plans Her Departure

**A**fter more than eight years leading WEC, General Manager Patty Richards has announced she will step down January 14, 2022.

“It has been a wonderful experience leading this innovative and 100 percent renewable electric cooperative over the past eight years. It has been a privilege and honor to serve WEC’s members. I am proud of all that we have accomplished as a small yet mighty cooperative utility,” said Richards. “It has been a special honor to work alongside WEC’s dedicated staff, who are tireless in their efforts to keep the power on in this rugged and rural terrain.”

Richards said her departure timeline reflects her commitment to long-term planning for the health of the Co-op. She intentionally gave the Board of Directors almost seven months of notice in order to give them plenty of time to conduct a thorough search for the next GM.

She also needs the time, she explained, to lead WEC through the initial stages of the rural electric cooperative’s role in a project to bring high speed internet fiber to underserved parts of its service area, as well as to wrap up other initiatives this year.

“We’re beginning the pole inventory now to determine actual costs to bring fiber to members’ homes,” she said. “It’s important to make sure projects like this are

running strong and not impacted by transitions. After all, this is about providing a service to our members that they lack, and that is almost as essential these days as electricity.”

Richards also planned her timing so she could ensure WEC meets its lender requirements for 2021, she said.

*Many of Richards’ signature achievements demonstrate her acting with fiscal responsibility in service of the greater good.*

“On behalf of WEC’s board of directors and membership, I thank Patty for the energy and skills she has contributed to our Co-op over nearly a decade of service,” said former

Board President Barry Bernstein. “Patty has the special ability to work with everybody, and she is widely respected by our lenders, state regulators, policymakers, utility industry associates and of course our membership. We appreciate and have greatly benefited from her years of leadership and vision.”

### Leading during COVID

As an essential service provider operating during the COVID-19 pandemic, Richards led her staff through an unprecedented health hazard. While the work of line crews requires them to be in the field during emergencies of all kinds, Richards sought to protect their health by implementing safety protocols. Staggered work schedules, social isolation at work sites, remote work options, and all-staff phone meetings kept staff functioning smoothly while apart.

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*Big changes in WEC leadership. In April, General Manager Patty Richards announced she will leave the Co-op in January 2022. In late May, Barry Bernstein decided to not seek another term as President of the Board, and will not run for reelection to the Board after his term ends in 2022. The Board of Directors elected Steve Knowlton as President. Pictured: Bernstein acknowledging Richards’ five years of service at the 2018 Annual Meeting. Read more about their decisions and timelines in this issue.*

## At the 82nd Annual Meeting, It’s Back to Work

### Three Incumbent Directors Re-Elected

**T**he attendance of WEC’s 82nd Annual Meeting was approximately one tenth of the record-breaking attendance at the 80th Annual Meeting held at WEC’s Operations Center in 2019. Not bad for a virtual meeting with no dinner.

At a time when large indoor gatherings still felt like a distant reality, the virtual May 6 meeting was intimate, a small group of neighbors aligned in their interest in the health and governance of their electric cooperative. Those who attended were well rewarded. After a short business meeting, the 27 members, Board, staff, and others in attendance

enjoyed a set of guitar and fiddle tunes from Doug Perkins and Patrick Ross that set heads bobbing and, behind switched-off video screens, some actual dancing. All non-Board, non-staff member households in attendance also received gift certificates to local eateries as door prizes.

Former Board President Barry Bernstein kicked off the meeting. Since the main point of business of any Annual Meeting is the Board election, Bernstein read a statement from Ballot Committee Chair Joe Kelly, confirming that 695 members

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### Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

### Inside

**Broadband bill passes:** Patty and Barry celebrate Vermont’s historic investment in an essential service and plan WEC’s rollout. P. 2

**EVs cost less than fuel vehicles:** With incentives, they can be cheaper both up front and in the long run - and when you charge yours at night, you lower WEC’s peak costs. P. 4.

**Second phase of rate design takes effect:** July 1 marks the second phase of WEC’s rate redesign. More on p. 8.



*Wrightsville reservoir. Graffiti tags and artwork on WEC’s pumphouse have increased, raising aesthetic and safety concerns. GM Patty Richards is curious to see if community members are interested in gathering to think of productive, prosocial solutions. More on p. 6.*

**President's and General Manager's Message**

# Broadband Bill at the Finish Line; Construction Begins

*Plus leadership and staffing changes at WEC*

**Leadership changes**

**Barry:** Before we begin, I want to let members know that this is my final message as President of the Board. Following the Annual Meeting, the Board of Directors elected Steve Knowlton of East Montpelier to assume the role of President. Steve has been instrumental in getting WEC to this point in our work to make high speed internet available to all our members. Now that we are on the verge of starting rollout, his skills will guide us well.

I do want to say that it has been my pleasure and honor to lead this Co-op as Board President. I will continue to serve you, my fellow members, in my continuing role on the Board.

**Patty:** Thank you, Barry, for your leadership and teamwork as President these many years. Members may know by now that I have a big change, too. I am scheduled to leave WEC in early 2022. These are big transitions, but our Co-op is healthy, these big projects are moving forward, and it's a good time to step back. I am genuinely excited about the future of WEC under fresh leadership.

**Broadband rollout begins**

**Barry:** First, we celebrate. Then we'll get into the details. Folks, broadband is coming!

The first thing is to say thank you to the whole Vermont fiber team, which includes the Governor, the legislature, legislative leadership, the House

Energy & Technology Committee led by Reps. Tim Brigland and Laura Sibilia, the Senate Finance Committee led by Sen. Ann Cummings, and the House Ways and Means Committee headed by Rep. Janet Ancel.

Everybody wanted to make this work and everybody got very educated. The bill sailed through, and the Governor said he's going to sign it. Kudos to those folks, and to our congressional delegation who've been doing the heavy lifting at the federal level.

Everybody has worked and communicated for quite a long time to make this happen. I want to recognize the hours Co-op staff put into this, along with my fellow Board member Steve Knowlton and I, along with the CUDs [Communications Utility Districts] CV Fiber, EC Fiber, and Kingdom Fiber, and the two ISPs [Internet Service Providers] that have worked with us, ValleyNet and Kingdom Fiber.

Now there's an additional \$150

million to roll out broadband statewide. Along with VELCO, one of our partners, we are stringing 10 miles of fiber, and hopefully another partner, CV Fiber, can begin fiber hookup in Calais sometime this fall.

**Patty:** There's been a lot of pre-work done to start us out. We have a long way to go. One of the realities we're facing is the cost of fiber line has gone up dramatically, like 40 percent. Initially we thought we were looking at a \$23 million project, and now we're looking at \$33-35 million.

But that's not a deterrent. We're going to apply for grants to help us keep the cost down. As Barry said, our staff and Board have been critical to getting us where we are today. We have to apply for a loan with RUS [Rural Utilities Service], one of our lenders, and that will go out this month, so we have a lot of work left to do.

The project Barry referred to this

## Co-op Currents

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.

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*The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Dawn Johnson, at 224-2332, or visit [wec.coop/board-of-directors](http://wec.coop/board-of-directors).*

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## Barry Bernstein Announces Plan to Step Back

by Barry Bernstein

**A**fter 22 years as WEC Board President, I have made the decision to step down as President and retire from the Board when my term ends in May, 2022. In looking over the past years, I am extremely proud of all WEC has been able to accomplish during my tenure. We constructed the Coventry Landfill Gas-to-electric plant. Since 2014, WEC has had a 100 percent all-renewable power supply, with 85 percent generated in-state. Our Co-op encouraged and supported our member-owners in their efforts to improve energy efficiency, and long ago eliminated nuclear energy in the portfolio of power we supply to our members.

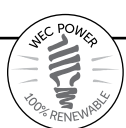
WEC is now getting ready to build out 860 miles of "middle mile" backbone on WEC poles, leasing at cost to the three local not-for-profit Communication Union Districts and their designated internet service providers (ISP), with the intent they serve all WEC households with high speed internet—universally accessible at affordable rates.

In all, I am very grateful for being part of the Cooperative team effort on these projects, and for the day in/day out commitment by our dedicated Board, General Managers, and our WEC employees who show up, regardless of the weather, to make sure every member-owner has access to one of the most essential and critical services: reliable electricity. We all too often, myself included, take for granted how important WEC is, and has been for 83 years, in providing something so basic and essential to our lives. Thank you all, WEC member-owners, WEC Directors, WEC employees, and the others who have supported WEC over many years.

I am leaving WEC's leadership in great hands, with our new Board President Steve Knowlton, Vice President Roger Fox, Treasurer Don Douglas, Secretary Anne Reed, and the rest of your Board.

**Got something to say?**

Letter to the editor, comment, or a story tip? Drop us a line at [currents@wec.coop](mailto:currents@wec.coop) or Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: Co-op Currents.





summer is like a pilot project. VELCO, the state transmission utility, is helping us connect a fiber line from a substation in East Montpelier to a substation in Calais. Along the route, we'll be able to connect 90 or so households to internet service.

**Barry:** This project is to connect our eight substations to improve system reliability, but working with VELCO means they've agreed to string the fiber on our distribution poles. Working with CUDs means they can begin to offer service to a small number of members. So yes, Patty, this is the first step. It's 10 miles of line, but with this small step, the Town Clerk's office and some of our members will have access to high speed internet.

Our rollout will start in earnest sometime in early 2022. We're looking at three to four years to get the fiber on our distribution poles. As we roll that out, we'll lease it to CV Fiber and EC Fiber and Kingdom Fiber in the towns they represent, and they'll come through with an ISP behind us.

As Patty pointed out, it's not instant, but it will happen. Not everyone will get served at once. We hope to lay out 300 miles of fiber a year. It's important for people to remember 72 percent of our members are unserved or underserved. That's close to 8,000 member households who don't have adequate internet. We've waited a long time. Bear with us, it's really happening over the next few years.

### Annual Meeting results

**Patty:** Well, we just hosted our second Annual Meeting virtual-style. This year we had just under 30 people. It was a quick business meeting, and we confirmed Board election results: welcome back, Roger Fox, Steve Knowlton, and Richard Rubin. In the last 30 minutes of the meeting we had a little traditional music from Doug



*These are big transitions, but our Co-op is healthy, these big projects are moving forward, and it's a good time to step back. I am genuinely excited about the future of WEC under fresh leadership.*

— Patty Richards

Perkins and Patrick Ross. It came off so well and everyone really enjoyed this year's meeting.

**Barry:** Patty, when you mention Doug and Patrick, they are two extremely well respected and talented musicians, known regionally and nationally. They also live in WEC member households.

Most years our sponsors give us door prizes, and they're extremely popular with the membership. This year the way we did door prizes was pretty special. One of our Directors, Jean Hamilton, works getting meals to people and supporting restaurants at the same time [see the July 2020 issue]. At her suggestion we purchased gift certificates to local restaurants to give

away as door prizes. Every attending member household got one. So even though our Annual Meeting was virtual again, WEC still found ways to support and thank our musicians and restaurants, local people and businesses hard hit by the lockdown.

**Patty:** Hopefully, next year we can meet in person. And we can combine an in-person meeting with a virtual platform, so people can attend whichever way they prefer, on their own terms. This hybrid model is an important development, because it's a way of making the Annual Meeting more inclusive for those who can't travel. It's a real opportunity to expand how we reach our members. I'm looking forward to more of that in the future.

### Staffing changes

**Patty:** We're excited to welcome Dave Kresock, our new Director of Operations & Engineering. He has more than 20 years of experience on the electric side and another 15-20 on the telecom broadband side. He started June 1.

Brad Nutbrown retired after more

than 20 years as our mechanic. We wished him well and had a nice luncheon with him. Cheryl Willette, after 14 years as our CFO, is leaving in July to embrace a new career in the medical field. We're also saying goodbye to some of our longest serving staffers. Linda Nelson is leaving WEC after 38 years, and Brent Lilley after 34. We wish them all the very best.

In some musical chairs, Dawn Johnson is staying with us, but she's changing jobs to become Plant Accountant. That role was vacated because Gordon Matheson is moving back to Member Services.

**Barry:** And the Board is just beginning its search for a new General Manager. Patty's timing means we can be intentional about our search. If you have interest or a recommendation, let any Board member know.

We're hoping to get someone who knows our territory and the weather. It's not critical that someone is totally an electric utility person. Mainly, we're looking for someone who can provide leadership and management, and a commitment to cooperative principles. Our members are our owners, and we're to serve, not to make a profit. If someone can bring those qualities and innovation, that's what we're looking for.

### COVID update

**Patty:** We are happy to announce that as the governor relaxes restrictions, at WEC we will have all employees back in the office effective June 1, our doors will open 7:30, our

office hours will be 7:30 - 4:00 Monday through Friday.

**Barry:** I again want to really thank the staff for being so conscientious through this and following the protocol that's been set. It hasn't been easy, but it's a lot easier when you have everyone on staff willing to support each other.

**Patty:** We were lucky to have no major outbreaks. We had two employees get sick with COVID, but the protocols in place prevented a widespread outbreak. That would have been devastating if our line crew, Member Services Representatives, or any

WEC staff got sick. It's really important, the steps we took to protect our staff.

### Wrightsville permitting and vandalism

**Patty:** Any hydro dam that's 30 years or older has to go through a long permit process. We are in the fourth year of this permit approval process, and fingers crossed, we are at 98 percent of our timeline. Just a few more steps and we anticipate we'll get the green light from FERC [Federal Energy Regulatory Commission] and the state for our water quality permit to renew the license. Our current license expires October 2022, so we're hoping to get renewal this year so we're well ahead of the game. If anything that happens that's a curveball, we have time to respond.

**Barry:** It went online in 1985, but we got our license to build in 82-83.

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## WEC Welcomes Stephen Knowlton, New Board President

**O**n May 26, WEC's Board of Directors elected Steve Knowlton of East Montpelier as the new President, replacing Barry Bernstein. Knowlton has been a WEC member since 2001 and a Board member since 2014. He has served on the Power & Operations Committee, Policy Committee, and chaired the Members & Marketing Committee.

"I want to ensure the Board governs the Co-op with excellence on behalf of all of us to light the Co-op's path into the future," Knowlton said.

Learn more about Knowlton and his governance plans in the forthcoming July issue of *Co-op Currents*.



## What's your internet story?

As WEC works to make high speed internet available to all members, *Co-op Currents* is looking for stories from members about the role broadband—or the lack of it—plays in their lives. Drop us a line at [currents@wec.coop](mailto:currents@wec.coop).

**Go Green.  
Go Electric.  
Go WEC!**





# Setting Good EV Charging Habits

*Flatten WEC's electric peak by setting up your EV to charge after 10 pm*

Here at your 100 percent renewable electric cooperative, we've encouraged the early adopters of electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids for several years. But now, as the universally popular Ford F150 pickup is about to make its electric debut, charging stations appear across the landscape like orange daylilies, and improved batteries mean far longer range, electric vehicles are on the verge of becoming mainstream.

Add to that the thousands of dollars in incentives available for new and used EVs, and we really are at a tipping point. If currently available incentives stay in place, the cost of a new base model 2022 Ford F150 Lightning should cost less than the gas powered version.

All that said, driving a car is a process of habits. Driving a different kind of vehicle requires dropping one set of habits—for example, regular oil changes—and developing new ones.

Director of Products & Services Bill Powell likes to help WEC members develop good home charging habits. 83 percent of Vermont EV charging is estimated to be residential, according to the Technical Advisory Group's screening tools, said Powell. That means the vast majority of Vermont EV drivers have their cars plugged in at home.

Powell, himself the driver of an all-electric Chevrolet Bolt, points out

*When EVs are fully mainstream, and every EV driver plugs in their car between 3 and 10 PM for a long charge, WEC and other distribution utilities must draw and deliver more electricity to meet that need. That means a steeper peak.*

that charging at home draws about the same amount of power as a dryer, but for a longer amount of time. "The Chevy Bolt has 66 kilowatt hours of capacity," he said. "It takes me nine hours to charge it with a 240 volt charger."

To put the range and price into perspective: The 2022 Bolt has an estimated 259 mile range when fully charged. At June 2021 rates, the

cost to fully charge Powell's EV is \$15.37. (That cost will drop slightly in July, when the next stage of WEC's rate redesign takes effect.) In the meantime, gas, a commodity with notorious cost variability, is teetering around \$2.90 a gallon. If Powell challenged the driver of a similar sized gas powered car to drive alongside a brand new Bolt for 259 miles, the other driver's gas would cost roughly \$10 more than the cost to charge the Bolt at home.

But Powell is also thinking about the future. When EVs are fully mainstream, and every EV driver plugs in their car between 3 and 10 PM for a long charge, WEC and other distribution utilities must draw and deliver more electricity to meet that need. That means a steeper peak.

Fortunately the solution is simple: "Plug it in after 10 PM," advised Powell.



*The Ford F-150 Lightning stands to change the game with electric vehicles: not only is it the first electric version of the iconic pickup truck, but with incentives it can cost much less than its gas-powered counterpart. As electric vehicles enter the mainstream, Energy Coach Bill Powell has some habit-changing tips to make EVs work with your lifestyle.*

ford.com

Not literally. Nobody needs to get out of bed to go out to the carport at 10 PM. "With equipment both on board the vehicle and in the PowerShift app on your phone, you can preset it and let it rip," explained Powell.

So there you have it. Your new electric vehicle, purchased with incentives for less than the cost of a gas vehicle, charges at home for

significantly less than filling up at the pump—not to mention other maintenance savings accrued over time. And by using your PowerShift app to charge it while you sleep, you can help crush your cooperative electric utility's peak.

*Data from driveelectricvt.com, caranddriver.com, wired.com, ford.com*

## Annual Meeting

*continued from page 1*

cast valid ballots in the 2021 election, constituting a quorum.

The election was uncontested. Each incumbent Director up for re-election in 2020 held their seat: they are Roger Fox of Walden, Stephen Knowlton of East Montpelier, and Richard Ruben of Plainfield.

When the time came to approve the minutes from the 2020 Annual Meeting—which was held to validate election results only and ended after about seven minutes—member and former Director Monique Hayden proposed adding clarifying language to the minutes. "I know I'm going to look back in 10 years," and wonder why the meeting was so short, she pointed out. "I think it would be prudent to add something to the effect of: It is noted that the format and content of this Annual Meeting was significantly altered to protect the health and safety of all and to comply with the public gathering guidelines set forth at the time by the Governor due to the public health emergency declared as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This alteration is not intended to represent a permanent change in holding Annual Meetings in the future."

## Detailed Election Results:

- Roger Fox, Vice President; Walden: 654 votes
- Stephen Knowlton, East Montpelier: 657 votes
- Richard Ruben, Plainfield: 652 votes
- Write-ins: 8
- Blank votes: 114

Bernstein agreed to accept the language as a "friendly amendment" to the minutes and they entered the record under the motion of Board Secretary Annie Reed of Marshfield, and the second of member Sandal Cate of Montpelier.

Bernstein thanked General Manager Patty Richards for leading WEC through the pandemic, creating as seamless an experience as possible for members while protecting the health and safety of staff. He also acknowledged Richards' recent departure announcement. "I'd like to congratulate her and thank her for her service, since we won't have the change to do that [at an Annual Meeting] before she leaves," he said.

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## What Cost Savings Can I Expect When I Buy an EV?

There are multiple incentives available to offset the sticker cost of electric vehicles. For some customers, household income can factor in additional incentives. Stacked together, these incentives can bring the cost of a new or used EV well below the cost of a similar vehicle with a combustion engine.

WEC members may qualify for:

- Federal incentives
- State incentives
- WEC incentives
- Incentives through Capstone's MileageSmart program
- Coming soon, a Recycle your Ride program (similar to Cash for Clunkers)

With no transmission, spark plugs, or oil, electric cars are much cheaper to maintain over time. You will still need to switch over your snow tires, however.

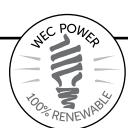
To estimate just how much you can save, visit [driveelectricvt.com](http://driveelectricvt.com) and click "Why go electric." There are handy calculators for incentive eligibility and for cost of ownership.

See other resources at the Vermont Energy Dashboard: [vtenergy-dashboard.org](http://vtenergy-dashboard.org).

Before you buy, check in with Bill Powell to make sure you're getting all the incentives you're entitled to: [energycoach@wec.coop](mailto:energycoach@wec.coop).

## Key Takeaways from the Annual Meeting

- As of June 1 the WEC office is open to members and the public, 7:30 AM - 4 PM.
- Federal relief funds and increased electricity sales will forestall a rate increase in 2021.
- Directors Roger Fox (Walden), Stephen Knowlton (East Montpelier) and Richard Ruben (Plainfield) each won re-election.





## Employees Celebrate Work Anniversaries

"WEC has been really fortunate with having great, dedicated folks," said Board President Barry Bernstein. Bernstein and General Manager Patty Richards offered heartfelt appreciation and congratulations to:

Gordon Matheson, Plant Accountant, 5 years

Mike Gray, System Maintenance Technician, 10 years

Dan Couture, System Maintenance Technician, 10 years

Bill Powell, AKA The Energy Coach, Director of Products & Services, 30 years

Richards' last day will be in January 2022, and that ample notice, Bernstein said, "makes the transition of looking for someone to replace her far more normal in a very abnormal year."

### Douglas: Some good news in increased sales

In his brief report, Board Treasurer Don Douglas of Orange announced that the pandemic had a positive effect on the Co-op's finances. "We sold \$1.3 million more in electricity in 2020 than we did in 2019," he said, because the Co-op's membership base is vastly residential, and people continue to work and use electricity at home instead of commuting.

In other finance news, WEC met its lender requirements and "we had another perfect audit," he said, thanking the three staff in the Co-op's finance department for their diligence. The audit is available on WEC's website, and paper copies can be mailed out by request.

### Richards: Reopening the office, COVID arrearages, rate design

General Manager Patty Richards told the assembly that while she was sad this is her final Annual Meeting leading the Co-op, she's excited to "leave WEC in great shape and let a new GM take over with high energy."

Addressing the ways WEC adapted in response to the pandemic, Richards said, "It's not an option to close doors and not do work, so we got creative quickly." In 2020, WEC's office staff quickly pivoted from working in the office to remote work with staggered office shifts; a move that required a huge amount of work to link telecommunications systems into staff members' homes,

so that the experience for members calling in was seamless. Richard recognized Information Specialist Kevin Stevens for his role in that speedy reconfiguration.

As far as protecting staff from exposure to the COVID-19 virus, Richards announced the Co-op had two positive test results among staff, both of whom contracted the virus from family members, and neither of whom became very sick. Because of WEC's stringent safety protocols, the virus was prevented from being transmitted among staff, and WEC was never understaffed in the event of an outage or emergency.

"The big news," Richards said, "is we are on Phase 6 of our staffing plans, which means we are preparing to reopen." On June 1, Richards said, WEC's East Montpelier office will be fully staffed and open full-time, 7:30 AM to 4 PM, to members and the general public.

While Don Douglas described the financial upside to the Co-op of members using more electricity, Richards noted there is also a downside. "That also meant we had more folks struggling to pay bills," she pointed out. She described the "aggressive campaign" WEC's Member Services team launched to reach out to members in arrears due to COVID-related illness, caregiving requirements, job loss, or other factors. Those members were linked to the state's 2020 relief program Vermont Covid Arrearage Assistance Program (VCAAP), which helped wipe away debts by paying off arrearages. Through that effort, Richards estimated WEC recouped several hundred thousand dollars. However, at \$250,000 the combined total of accounts still in arrears is far higher



Renowned local musicians Patrick Ross, fiddle, and Doug Perkins, guitar, provided musical entertainment for attendees of WEC's 82nd Annual Meeting.

than normal. "Luckily," said Richards, "increased sales helps us outweigh that."

In addition, she said, WEC applied for and received \$843,000 in small business assistance (SBA) funds. The financial security, Richards said, means "the big news for 2021 is: no rate increase."

When it comes to the Service Quality & Reliability Plans (SQRPs) required by state regulators, Richards announced WEC met every metric except one: phone calls not answered in less than 20 seconds. The issue, she said, is the wait period between when a member calling in off-hours is rerouted from WEC lines to the Cooperative Response Center (CRC) call overflow service. Richards said effort are underway to shrink the wait period.

Finally, Richards said, the Co-op has had the first phase of its new rate design in effect for just about a year. While many members have been pleased to see their bills go down, some low electricity users are unhappy to see increased bills, she acknowledged. The design will be fully implemented in two more phases. The second phase takes effect July 1, increasing the residential monthly charge to \$22.25 per meter and lowering rates to \$.22220.

There were no questions from members present, so on to the entertainment.

### Live music

Keeping with the tradition of following the business meeting with an interesting presentation, speakers, or entertainment, WEC presented well-respected local musicians Doug Perkins, on guitar, and Patrick Ross, on fiddle. The duo performed in the same room, giving participants the pleasure of watching and listening to two talented musicians play off each other.

The songs were all traditional in style, but they ranged across time and culture: French Canadian fiddle tunes, a warm-blooded Django Reinhardt number, an eerie tune Ross's father composed that conjured up the sound of ice cracking on a frozen lake, and Perkins' composition, the allium-inspired Garlic Patch Rag.

Even behind screens, their audience was delighted. Some bobbed their heads along; with cameras turned off, others got up to dance. Board member Jean Hamilton summed it up: "Thanks for the live music! We've missed it!"

The meeting closed with notes of appreciation and pleasure for the performance. Next year, Bernstein said, he hopes WEC will be able to host an in-person dinner and Annual Meeting again. But for now, the Garlic Patch Rag brought something neighborly, fun, and pure central Vermont to the virtual experience. 🍷

## ENERGY COACH SAYS:

### Through July 31, Recycle Old Appliances Through Efficiency Vermont!

If you have an old secondary fridge, standalone freezer, AC unit, dehumidifier, or other energy inefficient appliance taking up space, Efficiency Vermont will organize recycling pickup of up to 4 units per household. Plus, you'll get a rebate of \$50 for fridges and freezers, and \$20 for ACs and dehumidifiers.

Residential members only. Units must be working. Primary fridges are not eligible. Offer is first come, first served through July 31.

Further details and pickup scheduling: [arcaincutility.com/VT/efficiencyvermont/](http://arcaincutility.com/VT/efficiencyvermont/) or 888-998-6323.



## WEC Personnel on the Move

### Warm welcome to:

- Dave Kresock, Director of Operations & Engineering! Meet Kresock in the forthcoming July issue of *Co-op Currents*.

### Fond farewell to:

- Brent Lilley, Operations & Construction Services Manager
- Linda Nelson, Assistant Finance Director
- Bradley Nutbrown, Mechanic
- Cheryl Willette, Chief Financial Officer



Bradley Nutbrown



Linda Nelson

### Changing positions:

- Gordon Matheson, from Plant Accountant to Member Services Representative
- Dawn Johnson, from Administrative Assistant to Plant Accountant
- Teia Greenslit, from Senior Accountant to Assistant Finance Director

# Looking for Cooperative Solutions to Property Damage

*WEC seeks community interest in a forum on constructive action to prevent harm at Wrightsville pumphouse and elsewhere*

In early May, System Technician Mike Gray sent WEC senior staff a few pictures of the pumphouse at WEC's member-owned hydro generation plant at Wrightsville Reservoir. "This seems to be getting worse," he noted in an email. The structure was covered in recent graffiti. Gray pointed out that his main concern was what might happen if people hanging out at the pumphouse damaged the equipment inside.

General Manager Patty Richards' reaction was double pronged. First, WEC requested extra patrols from law enforcement to minimize the dam's appeal as a place to hang out. Second, she wanted to find a way to positively engage the people whose partying she hoped to displace. "WEC's intention is to have the behavior stop and to prevent anyone getting hurt. A spree of painting doesn't make you a bad individual," she pointed out.

Richards had this in mind when Pat Hoffman, Victim Services Specialist from the Montpelier Community Justice Center, reached out. Community

justice is a form of repairing harm done within a community in a way that centers the party affected by harm. So even in a case like this, where no one responsible has been identified, WEC has avenues to consider what repair might look like and how the community could come together to prevent further property damage. "I'm looking at this as a much bigger thing and want to think of it as community action. What can we do, as a cooperative within the community, to bring people together?" Richards asked.

In a meeting with Hoffman, center director Carol Plante, and *Co-op Currents*, Richards learned that other businesses in the Central Vermont community have experienced vandalism, and some have found ways to either engage positively with the individuals who damaged their buildings—for example, getting to know each other while painting walls together—or have voiced interest in community solutions.

"I would love to get together with those folks and say, what can we do

about this so we don't have it happen again? If youth need a place to hang out, can they have one?" suggested Richards. Community-led grassroots action including youth voices is certainly worth trying, explained Hoffman, because "the solutions we are applying don't work. We wouldn't see any graffiti if calling the police worked. Second, we would always know who did it." Plante added that building community, and a sense of belonging and ownership, "are all the right reasons to do this from the ground up."

So in the interest of cooperative

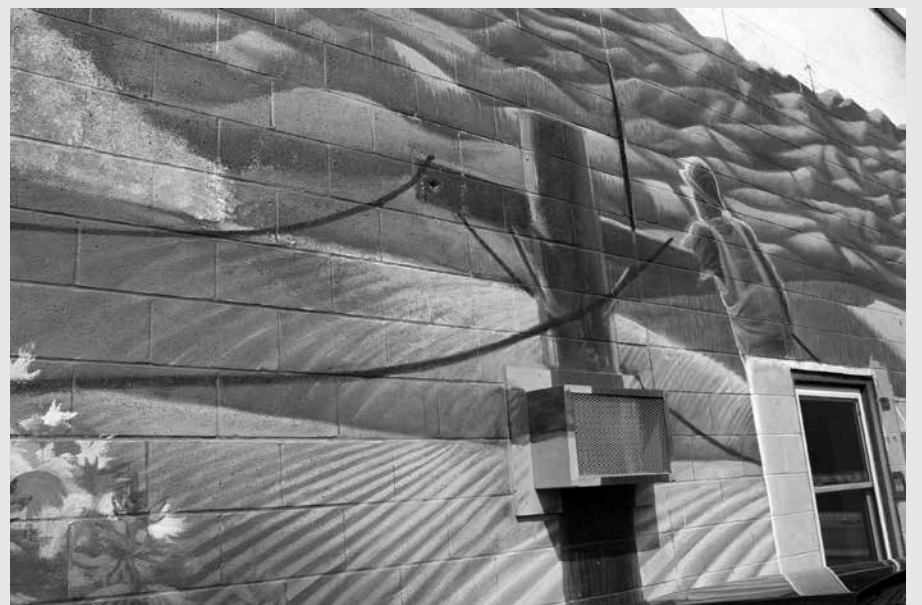
solutions to problems that may lack an easy fix, WEC is putting out the call to see if there are community members interested in participating in a restorative, constructive forum on what action our communities can take to prevent property damage.

In particular: business owners; youth; artists familiar with mural art, graffiti art, and graffiti etiquette (there is indeed such a thing); and those interested in contributing to big picture, prosocial solutions. Please contact [patty.richards@wec.coop](mailto:patty.richards@wec.coop) with your interest.

## Where Are the Graffiti Pictures?

As Pat Hoffman of the Montpelier Community Justice Center said, "We have good examples of people painting on a business in ways that are useful to the business."

At WEC, the four season mural on the side of the warehouse in East Montpelier is an excellent example. Painted by local artist Ethan Fielder, the mural is a work of art and a point of pride for the Co-op. Rather than highlighting non-constructive expression, let's look for examples of what we want to see.



## What's the Problem?

- Some graffiti includes visible swear words. Families recreate at the reservoir, and Richards is concerned about young children's exposure to the graffiti.
- The pumphouse contains equipment that could badly hurt an individual unfamiliar with how to use it.
- The pumphouse operates what Richards calls "an ecofriendly hydro plant. It's very friendly to aquatic life because we have such little spill capacity." WEC's power is 100 percent renewably generated, but within the New England grid, any time a renewable plant turns off, a fossil fuel plant turns on to keep up with grid-wide power needs. If damage to the Wrightsville hydro plant caused it to shut off, that would trigger a fossil fuel-burning plant to pick up the load elsewhere, contributing to climate change.

## President & GM Message

*continued from page 3*

**Patty:** One other thing about Wrightsville. We had some folks come by our pumphouse on the reservoir and do some spray painting. We asked for police patrols to be increased to cut down on hanging out down there, and the police told us vandalism in general is on the rise. But rather than make this a giant negative, we're going to look at positive intervention. I know people are carrying around a lot of frustrations right now, especially young people. So we're going to do some outreach and see what we can do as a community to make a positive out of a negative.

## Second phase of rate design to take effect

**Patty:** On July 1, the second phase of our rate redesign will take effect. Phase 2 shows our customer charge is going to go from \$18.01 to \$22.25 and at the same time, the charge for kilowatt hours used after the first 100 will drop from \$0.23292 to \$0.22220. It's not a rate increase, WEC makes no money off of this. It's a redistribution of how we charge the membership.


**Barry:** It won't show up in members' bills until November, but the Board just approved our capital credit return for 2021. We're crediting \$770,000 back to our members. That means that over 23 years, WEC will have returned more than \$9 million to our members.

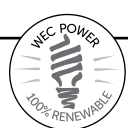
So if you were a member in 1996-1997, still a member in 2013, and are still a member today, you'll get a credit on your bill corresponding to how much electricity you bought in each of those years. That could be quite a chunk. Even if you were a new member in 2020, you'll still get a credit.

That's important for people to know because even when we do have a rate increase—which we didn't in 2021—you still get money coming back as a credit on your bill. Sometimes when you add that up it offsets any increase we have. And in for-profit utilities, do you know where that \$9 million goes?

**Patty:** Well, the ratepayers don't see it again.

**Barry:** It goes to shareholders' pockets. One more thing. Many of our members donate their credits to our Community Fund. Then we distribute those funds to libraries, fire departments, senior centers, food service, teen programs, and others doing important work in the towns we serve.

**Patty:** If you can afford to donate your credits, it's an incredibly good use of those funds. Especially now, these small organizations are hard hit and really filling in the gaps where people are struggling. If you can choose to donate your credits, the Community Fund puts them to good work right here in Central Vermont. 





**Richards**

*continued from page 1*

While two employees tested positive and quarantined at different times, these protocols prevented any virus transmission among staff. As of June 1 the office is fully open, almost all staff are fully vaccinated, and WEC has avoided any outbreaks among its team members.

**Fiscal leadership**

The world and the energy landscape changed dramatically over Richards' years as WEC's General Manager. She observed and navigated long-term trends affecting WEC's finances, including the rapid rise of net metering, turbulence in the Renewable Energy Credit market, and Central Vermont's lack of reliable internet and relatively static population.

Many of Richards' signature

achievements demonstrate her acting with fiscal responsibility in service of the greater good. For example: WEC saw increased electricity sales in 2020, and also saw a steep rise in members struggling to pay for electric service. Under Richards, WEC staged a campaign to proactively and compassionately connect with members experiencing pandemic-related financial hardship. Staff offset financial loss to the utility by helping members create individual budgets and apply for the state's arrearage program. As a result, WEC was able to recoup \$214,000 in unpaid bills.

**Intersectional leadership**

Richards joined WEC in 2013, after the retirement of previous General Manager (now State Representative) Avram Patt. Previously she had consulted for the Co-op and worked for Burlington Electric Department.

Through frequent member events, her open-office policy, and her advocacy before state leaders, Richards built a reputation for transparency and approachability, fiscal responsibility, and commitment to membership and community—and especially to WEC's staff.

She recognized that while WEC is a small and rural electric cooperative, its Board and membership are vocally committed to meaningful change. Richards harnessed that unique strength to lead boldly on system-wide issues; including changing the way WEC charges for electric service to encourage beneficial electrification.

Demonstrating a clear understanding of intersecting issues, Richards advocated for increased diversity at WEC and in Vermont's electric industry; worked with Member Services and industry partners to provide accessible multilevel supports for WEC

members living in financial instability, and initiated action and adoption of a Climate Change policy by WEC's Board, the first policy statement of its kind from a Vermont electric utility.

Other key achievements over Richards' tenure include:

- Receiving the 2020 Distinguished Service Award from the Northeast Public Power Association (NEPPA), where Richards served as a board member and Vice Chair
- Transforming WEC members' power outage experience with timely, responsive, and proactive communications and resources during outages
- Collaborating with members to implement a new rate structure that lowers the cost per kilowatt hour to incentivize using electricity; a structure other Vermont utilities may consider as a possible model to reduce emissions and use of fossil fuels
- More than doubling contributions to WEC's member-supported Community Fund, which supports small nonprofits working in WEC's service area
- Working with a team to build and operate a siloxane removal system at WEC's generation plant at Coventry Landfill, improving efficiency and production at the plant and lowering costs for members

"I am committed to give wings to the projects I promised members, including improving reliability and communication and finding innovative ways to reduce the capital costs to replace fossil fuel-powered devices with electric ones," pledged Richards. "I am excited to see what the future holds for WEC."

After her departure, Richards looks forward to more deeply exploring some of her interests, including traveling in a post-COVID world, training sled dogs and enjoying time with family and friends.



# Button Up 2021 Incentives for WEC Members

## Thermal Incentives

### Weatherization



**WEC**

- Weatherization improvements to building shell: \$600 for Home Performance with Energy Star contractor

**Efficiency Vermont**

- Receive 50% of project costs back, up to \$1,000.
- WEC member households may be eligible for 50% of project costs, up to \$3,000; see eligibility, here: <https://www.efficiencyvermont.com/rebates/list/home-performance-with-energy-star>

### Heat Pump Incentives

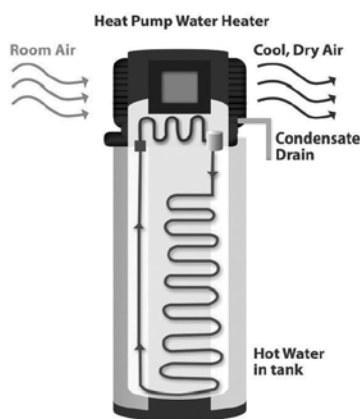
**WEC & EVT 2021 Heat Pump (HP) Incentives<sup>1</sup>**

*A qualifying house meets or exceeds minimum thermal standards (VT Residential Energy Code)*

	Point of purchase discount <sup>2</sup>	WEC bonus incentive <sup>3,4</sup>
Ductless - ≤2 tons	\$350	\$250
Ductless - >2 tons	\$450	\$250
Ducted - ≤2 tons	\$1,000	\$250
Ducted - >2-<4 tons	\$1,500	\$250
Ducted - ≥4 tons	\$2,000	\$250

**Air to water (A2W) heat pump**      \$1,000/ton

**Ground source heat pump**      Coming in 2021



- 1 Qualified by Efficiency Vermont
- 2 Point of purchase discount applied; provided by Efficiency Vermont
- 3 HP installed in building meeting/exceeding thermal standards (VT residential energy code)
- 4 Contact WEC for eligibility for bonus incentive

**Heat Pump Water Heater (Hybrid) Incentives<sup>1</sup>**

	Point of purchase discount <sup>2</sup>	WEC bonus incentive <sup>4</sup>
Replacing conventional electric hot water	Up to \$600	-
Replacing fossil-fired hot water system	Up to \$600	\$250

*WEC encourages members considering purchase of HPWH to select unit with CTA-2045 communication port, to enable future participation in a Co-op load management program*

### Pellet Stoves, Furnaces, and Boilers Incentives



**WEC**

- \$250 for either a qualifying pellet stove or a wood stove. Stoves must be installed by qualified installer.
- Pellet furnace: \$1,000
- Pellet boiler: \$1,000

**Efficiency Vermont\***

- Pellet stove: \$200 when installed by qualified contractor
- Pellet furnace or boiler: up to \$6,000

*Note: Incentives of over \$600 or more require a completed W-9 form. See <https://www.washingtonelectric.coop/energy-coach-home/>*

\*Offers subject to change. See [EfficiencyVermont.com](https://www.efficiencyvermont.com) for current details.

**802.224.2329 • [energycoach@wec.coop](mailto:energycoach@wec.coop)**





# Second Phase of Rate Design Takes Effect

**O**n July 1, the second phase of WEC's rate redesign takes effect:

- The residential monthly customer charge will rise to \$22.25
- The residential charge per kilowatt hour will drop to \$0.22220
- Members will continue to purchase the first 100 kilowatt hours each month at the reduced rate of \$0.08476.

This is not a rate increase. Some members see bills go up; some see bills go down; some stay the same. The increased customer charge and decreased cost per kilowatt hour stabilizes the Co-op's finances and incentivizes members to use more electricity for home heating and transportation.

The final phase of the rate design will be implemented July 1, 2022.

CLASS OF SERVICE	PHASE 2	PHASE 3
	Effective July 2021 billing date	Effective July 2022 billing date
<b>Residential</b>	Monthly Customer Charge . . . . . \$22.25	Monthly Customer Charge . . . . . \$26.49
	1st 100 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.08476	1st 100 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.08476
	Over 100 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.22220	Over 100 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.21149
<b>Small Commercial</b>	Monthly Customer Charge . . . . . \$26.49	Monthly Customer Charge . . . . . \$26.49
	Per kWh/month . . . . . \$0.20136	Per kWh/month . . . . . \$0.20136
<b>Large Power</b>	Monthly Customer Charge . . . . . \$31.79	Monthly Customer Charge . . . . . \$31.79
	Demand Charge per kW/month . . . . . \$16.53	Demand Charge per kW/month . . . . . \$16.53
	Per kWh/month . . . . . \$0.11434	Per kWh/month . . . . . \$0.11434
<b>Time of Day</b>	Monthly Customer Charge . . . . . \$15.03	Monthly Customer Charge . . . . . \$15.03
	<b>Peak Hours</b>	
	First 60 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.12025	First 60 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.12025
	All kWh over 60 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.29720	All kWh over 60 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.29720
	<b>Off Peak Hours</b>	
	First 140 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.12025	First 140 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.12025
All kWh over 140 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.25273	All kWh over 140 kWh/month . . . . . \$0.25273	
<b>Security Light</b>	Per 100 Watt HPS/month . . . . . \$23.39	Per 100 Watt HPS/month . . . . . \$23.39
	Per 400 Watt HPS/month . . . . . \$46.78	Per 400 Watt HPS/month . . . . . \$46.78
	Per 30-40 Watt LED . . . . . \$22.04	Per 30-40 Watt LED . . . . . \$22.04
	Per 40-50 Watt LED . . . . . \$22.44	Per 40-50 Watt LED . . . . . \$22.44
	Per 50-60 Watt LED . . . . . \$23.37	Per 50-60 Watt LED . . . . . \$23.37
	Per 60-70 Watt LED . . . . . \$22.30	Per 60-70 Watt LED . . . . . \$22.30

## PUC Notice of Hearing Clarification

**T**he hearing in the adjacent PUC notice took place on June 15. Per state rules, WEC is required to run the notice in this newsletter, even though the hearing took place in the past. Members received advance notice of the hearing in bill inserts, on [wec.coop](http://wec.coop), and through other communications.

### Recycle Your Batteries at WEC!

**N**ow that WEC's office is open to members again, make sure to bring your dead batteries the next time you stop by. Non-rechargeable batteries contain harmful toxins and should never be thrown into household trash. So keep them out of Coventry Landfill, the site of the landfill-gas-to-electricity plant that powers most of WEC's members' homes, and recycle them safely at WEC's office in East Montpelier.



112 State Street  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Montpelier, VT 05620-2701  
TEL: 802-828-2358



TTY/TDD (VT: 800-253-0191)  
FAX: 802-828-3351  
E-mail: [puc.clerk@vermont.gov](mailto:puc.clerk@vermont.gov)  
Internet: <http://puc.vermont.gov>

### State of Vermont Public Utility Commission

May 25, 2021

#### NOTICE OF HEARING

You are hereby notified that a Hearing Officer of the Vermont Public Utility Commission, Elizabeth Schilling, Staff Attorney, will hold a **SCHEDULING CONFERENCE**, pursuant to 30 V.S.A. Sections 8 & 10 and Commission Rules 2.403 & 2.223, in PUC Case No. 21-1816-PET –

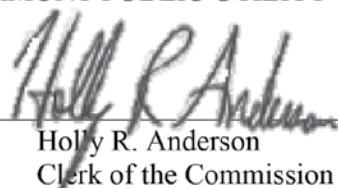
Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc.'s request for declaratory ruling regarding methodology for group net-metering system billing for systems directly interconnected –

on **June 15, 2021**, commencing at **11:00 A.M.**, via Go To Meeting videoconference.

Participants and members of the public may access the evidentiary hearing online at <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/319759509>, or call in by telephone using the following information: phone number: +1 (571) 317-3116; access code: 319-759-509. Participants may wish to download the GoToMeeting software application in advance of the hearing at <https://global.gotomeeting.com/install/319759509>. Guidance on how to join the meeting and system requirements may be found at <https://www.gotomeeting.com/online-meeting-support>.

Pursuant to 30 V.S.A. §§20 and 21, the Petitioner will be responsible for court reporter costs incurred by the Commission as a result of this scheduling conference. Invoices for these costs will be mailed to the attorney(s) of record or the official representative(s) for the Petitioner.

VERMONT PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

By:   
Holly R. Anderson  
Clerk of the Commission

